

STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: INSIGHT FROM SELECTED PRIVATE AND PUBLIC HOSPITALS IN PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This research study examined if relationship exists between the management of managerial stress and organizational performance, with reference to selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The management of managerial stress is a critical factor that needs a strategic attention in both home, family and workplace environment relationships, since it is revealed to impact on individual and overall organizational performance. The study employed survey research design and cross-sectional approach. A total of 120 statistically selected respondents were derived from 30 statistically selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt. The validity and reliability tests of data collection instrument were conducted, achieving consistency score of 0.814 Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Copies of Likert 5-type scale measure and structured questionnaire were distributed. After data cleaning, 108 copies were found fit for use in the analysis. The generated data were descriptively and inferentially analyzed, using Pearson's correlation and multiple regression techniques. The study revealed the existence of relationship between the major study variables, and the extent to which the managerial stress management can curb low productivity and enhance organizational performance. Severe stress is psychologically hazardous, mentally harmful and impacts negatively on organizational performance. Moderate stress as revealed tends to be potentially useful in organizational performance. Maintenance of appropriate job design and flexible working hour polices, amongst others, were recommended in respective functional areas.

KEYWORDS: Stress Management, Private and Public Hospitals, Organizational Performance & Managerial Stress

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INTRODUCTION

Managerial stress is a universal phenomenon which strategically manifests itself in human as a result of pressures from work or family issues. The stress emanating from workplace environment or family challenges is perceived to be a major contributor to high turnover rates, absenteeism, occupational accidents, low employee moral, in addition to increased medical expenses prevalent in many organizations. Our daily life activities are highly associated with one managerial work stress or the other, and this at workplace environment, is an ever increasing workplace challenge in our contemporary societies, which often times result to strategic cost at both individual employee and organizational levels (Ugoji and Isele, 2009). As argued by Wahab (2010), workplace stress is noted to be physically and mentally harmful to employees and organizational performance. Managerial stress significantly brings about health related challenges and organizational problems, resulting to employee's low productivity and overall low organizational performance, absenteeism and turn over (Boehr and Newman, 2004; Shular, 2008). Managerial stress need to be subjected to effective management study since it produces both positive and negative outcomes. Positive outcome

afford the manager an opportunity to gain something, and in that situation, managerial stress can be seen as a motivator that enhances managerial and organizational performance. The negative outcome of stress occurs or results to managers facing physical, organizational and related emotional challenges or strategic problems. It has been reported that a moderate amount of managerial stress may improve personal or organizational performance (Stoner, 2000). This situation can be exemplified in the areas of nervous tension which a manager may face when commencing a highly demanding and significant task in the workplace environment. Such situation can be regarded as a strategic aspect of stress. In related situation, the psychological activities resulting to some amounts of sustained stress may also result to serious headaches, hypertension and associated heart diseases and serious ailment which managers or people in general usually suffer.

Selye (2011) is noted to be among the world's famous pioneer on stress research. He introduced stress as a research concept in social science. Selye (2011), in a related development, conceptualized stress as "a non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it". The non-specific analogy of stress is as it could be implied that any adaptation to a problem faced by the body irrespective of the nature of problem, could also be included in the description of concept of stress. The occurrence or manifestation of stress involves two factors which are namely, internal and external. The internal or on-the-job factor occurrence relate to organizational pressure, while the external factor occurrence relate to non-organizational pressure, such as, family or social-economic pressures.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Fundamentally, the most strategic concern of most organizations including private and public hospitals in the study area is the firms' productive performance. It is important to remark that managerial stress can cause deliberate or unexpected deviations which organizational policies, rules, procedures and norms cannot do, with the resultant organizational performance hindrance. Managerial stress is notably a prevalent challenge and this strategically constitutes costly challenges in the study area, which invariably impacts on the performance of private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt. These strategic costly challenges in hospitals are related to what Selye (2011) noted and suggests that the prevalence of managerial stress in public hospitals fundamentally impacts on employee commitment and performance. Selye (2011) also observed that, one quarter of hospital employees view their jobs as the primary or number one stressors in their lives. In the related vein, Filippo (1984) argued that managerial stress is the key producer or cause of burnout among nurses and doctors in public hospitals. Managerial stress is observed to be a strategic problem that affects the performance of health workers, as well as related labour and mental exhaustive operations. In view of the fact that managerial stress can cause health workers to face different health challenges, aggression, absenteeism, reduction of employee and organizational performance, it therefore becomes necessary to subject the management of stress to critical strategic examination and study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to critically and empirically examine the impact of stress management strategies on organizational performance, with special reference to selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, with the following specific objectives:

- To examine the extent of the influence of stress management strategies on organizational performance of selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
- To investigate into the extent of relationship between flexible working hour and organizational performance of selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

- To examine if relationship exists between job design and organizational performance of selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were advanced to guide the research effort.

- To what extent do stress management strategies influence organizational performance in selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria?
- To what extent does flexible working hour as a dimension of stress management strategies affect organizational performance in selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria?
- To what extent does job design as a dimension of stress management strategies impact on organizational performance in selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria?

STUDY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

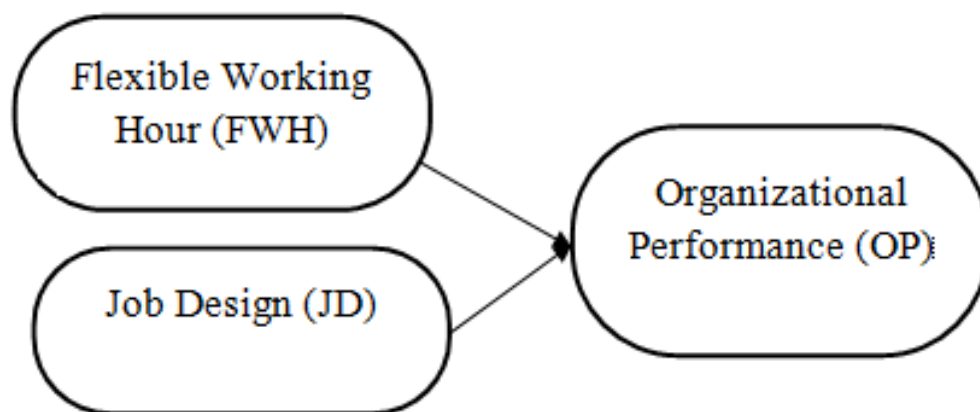


Figure 1: Study Conceptual and Operational Framework of Stress Management strategies and Organizational performance of selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Hypothesis

Ho₁: Flexible working hour as a component of stress management strategies has no significant impact on organizational performance of private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between job design as a dimension of stress management strategies and organizational performance of selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

THEORETICAL NEXUS AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Concept of Stress

Stress as a concept is defined by management scholars in different ways, but has related understanding. Stress as conceptualized and defined by The Oxford English Dictionary, is a state of affairs involving demand on physical or mental energy, a condition or circumstance which can disturb the normal physiological and psychological functioning of an individual. As described by Shular (2000), stress is seen as a dynamic condition in which organizational members are

confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand related to what they desire and for which the outcome is perceived to be uncertain and vital. Under this situation, Shular observed that there are certain conditions that are vital for potential stress to become actual stress. In relation to his observation, he argued that there must be conditions of uncertainty over the outcome of a situation and such outcome must of necessity, be significant irrespective of the perceived conditions. In this regard, stress is conceptualized as reactions to situations that demand constraints and opportunities. We also observe that when a manager or any other category of employee is being promoted to a new position, the person could be stressed up as a result of the new job, which could require some degree of tension, anxiety and pressure often associated and experienced by the person or any other organizational member. Stress could also arise when a person is not able to recognize his or her ability in coping with the demand of the job. It could also occur as a result of the interaction between a person and workplace environment challenges. Stress could also be seen from reactions to situations demanding constraints or opportunities. In relation to this, a promotion to a new job or position that requires greater responsibilities could cause a person to be stressed up. In view of this assertion, stress could be described as the degree of tension, anxiety and pressure often experienced by people or a job holder.

Onuoha (2011) conceptualized stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it. According to Onuoha (2011), what non-specific response implies is that, the same pattern of response could be proved by a number of different stressful stimuli or stressors. In relation to that, when an organism is confronted with an external or internal stressor, the body reacts and prepares for an action to defend itself. In medical terms, stress is referred to as a perturbation of the body's homeostasis. Accordingly, this kind of stress related demand on the body and human health is experienced when the body attempts to cope with some level of frequent changes in one's life functioning. When stress conditions are serious, it affects people negatively, and similar situation is applicable to personal and organizational performances. However, when stress condition is moderate, expected normality returns and such instances tend to be potentially useful in organizational or personal performance. It is important to remark that stress could cause psychological hazards and these are often associated with the employees' state of mind or mindset, which invariably affects personal or organizational performance. As argued by Gupta (2010), workplace stressors can result to stress, and this as he identified includes sickness, which can apparently lower organizational productivity. Relatedly, and as opined by Amanze and Agu (2014), stress is one of the commonest challenges often experienced by workers at work place environment. According to World health Organization (in Amanze and Agu, 2014), occupational or work related stress is the response people may have when they are presented with work demands and pressure that are not compatible or matched to their knowledge and abilities. Achalu (2009, in Amanze and Agu, 2014) and Nwogu (2019) relatedly suggest that stress can be regarded as a state of severe physiological and psychological tension resulting from the body's reaction to any demand placed upon it which can reduce an employee or organizational performance. In view of what we have discussed so far, it is important to note that managerial stress is not caused by a single variable, but potentially results from the complex interactions between a large system of interrelated variables. In another development, Amanze and Agu (2014) posit that, workplace or occupational stress can occur when there is discrepancy between the demands of the environment, workplace and individual's ability to carry out and complete these demands. It is vital to remark that, in relation to nature of workplace environment, stress is interwoven with human life and can stop its functioning when the individual or person stops breathing.

Managerial Stress

Managerial stress can be classified into two major types as opined by Copper (2004), and these include:

- Eutress, and
- Distress

Eutress: This type of stress is regarded as good stress. Eutress stimulates and enables people perform and accomplish personal and organizational set objectives. Eutress is derived from Greek word. Eutress means positive and good stress. Eutress can be described as the kind of stress people encounter during life events, which yields beneficial and rewarding values (Harrison, 2004). As further opined, eutress is often experienced by people who engage in competitions such as games, interviews and so on including other social life events relating to wedding ceremony, expectation of a cry of a new born baby from labour room into a house, among other expectations. Irrespective of these positive attributes of eutress, Adegege (2011) had advised that people should know how to manage eutress as to avoid it affecting them adversely as stress itself. Other usefulness of eutress includes, the provision of mental alertness, motivation and efficiency, as well as increase in self-esteem and satisfaction.

Distress: This type of stress is regarded as bad stress which potentially and fundamentally obstructs and hinders the effectiveness of employee and organizational performance. However, since by nature, human beings differ in multitudinal ways, so also will be their respective ways of managing stress.

Causes of Managerial Stress

As humans and managers, the attitudinal reactions of individuals differ and vary, so also the nature of the pressure exerted. It is important to note that, what may appear to be challenging and stressful to one person may not be seemingly so to another person. The causal factor of stress is known or referred to stressors. This according to Amanze and Agu (2014), could be grouped into two, namely:

- Stressors resulting from work demands stress such as,
 - Time pressure and meeting of deadline;
 - Difficult tasks and work over-load;
 - Nature of workplace environment;
 - Pressing or demanding work schedules and working conditions;
 - Unwanted overtime;
 - Shift work and schedules; and
 - Confusion over priorities.
- Stressors from workplace interpersonal relationship:
 - Poor interpersonal relationship with boss and organizational changes;
 - Poor relationship with colleagues, interpersonal and intergroup conflicts;
 - Personal conflicts;
 - Inability to delegate authority;
 - Bullying and harassment;
 - Lack of communication or gap in communication;
 - Career concerns and lack of social support;
 - Role ambiguity, and
 - Role conflict

Consequences of Managerial Stress in Organizations in relation to Organizational Performance

Research has it that functional stress improves organizational performance which invariably, enhances her survival and sustainability, but when allowed to develop into strain, it becomes dysfunctional and strategically dangerous to the fortunes of the organization (Schular, 2000; and Nwogu, 2019). It is also on record that indication of stress appears in a number of ways, including, high blood pressure, body irritability, ulcers, loss of appetite, routine decisions difficulty, and so on. These indicants of stress and many others can be classified into three major consequential and symptoms areas namely: physiological, psychological and behavioural manifestations.

Stress Management Strategies

The management of stress has been suggested to be an every hour need as it concerns individuals and organizational performances (Folksman, 1994). Stress management strategies relate to the direct interventions designed strategically to reduce the impact of stressors at home and workplace environment. The relevance of this assertion in our present study is to enhance personal or individual's potential ability in coping up with the perceived or existing stressors and expected achievement of organizational performance. Bruce (2003) relatedly argued that managerial stress management is the process of employing a proven group of techniques for the modification of stress, as well as thoughts, physical and emotional tensions' relaxation and learning how to make changes to the concerned environment whenever possible. In a related development, Newman (2009) suggested that, the major component of managerial stress management should be appropriate job design, cognitive restructuring or changing the way we think. Other components or dimensions of stress management strategies as suggested include: flexibility of working hour both at home and workplace environment of industrial organizations.

Organizational Performance

Organizational performance depends on employees' performance on particular objectives consisting of defined standard job design and description (Rotundo and Sackett, 2002). In a related vein, firm's performance depicts behaviours and actions outputs that are managed by the employees which eventually contribute to an organizational goals and objectives achievement. However, the relevance of employee performance in relation to organizational performance centers and depends on amount of work, the organizational goals and objectives, mission, and acceptable behaviours of the organization (Befort and Hattrup, 2003). Organizations are much concerned about employee performance (which is subject to the level of stress management) in view of its seemingly high productivity at the workplace (Carmeli, 2003). However, Carmeli (2003) emphasized that extra-role performance of an employee (as a result of effective stress management strategies) could be conceptualized as organization citizenship behaviour, and when an employee's job is less stressful, effective organizational performance will be achieved. On the other hand, Carmeli (2003) relatedly maintained that, intelligent employees that are able to manage their stress, emotions and maintenance of good mentality succeed in generating better organizational strategic performance.

Organizational performance also relates to the actual output or results of employed inputs as measured against intended outputs (Nwogu, 2019). In their own assertion, Richard, Delivinney and Johnson (2009), posit that, organizational (firm's) performance encompasses three specific areas, namely:

- Financial performance: Profits, return on assets (ROA), return on investment (ROI); etc.
- Product market performance: Sales; market share; etc.

- Shareholder return: Shareholder maximization; the balance scorecard; the triple bottom line and sustainable balance scorecard; etc.

Research Methodology

The study employed survey research design and cross-sectional approach, making use of structured research questionnaire for data collection. This approach provided us the directions in the execution of the research as argued by Chikwe and Ozuru (2017). From the list of private and public hospitals registered with Corporate Affairs Commission and Rivers State Hospitals Management Board, Port Harcourt, 30 registered private and public hospitals were statistically, selected. Based on this, four respondents including, doctors, nurses and admin heads from each of the selected study hospitals were purposively selected, summing up to 120 respondents that constituted the sample size. The validity and reliability tests of the data collection instrument were conducted and assured, achieving consistency test score of 0.814 Chronbach's Alpha Coefficient, with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Copies of Likert 5-type scale measure and structured questionnaire ranging from Very Great Extent to Very Low Extent method were distributed. After data cleaning, 108 copies of the research instrument were found fit for use in the analysis. The generated data were descriptively and inferentially analyzed, using Multiple Regression and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation techniques at 5% level of significance, with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software in the test of the posited hypotheses.

Data Analysis, Findings and Discussions

The study data analysis started with the exploration of univariate descriptive analysis and this method involved the statistical examination of one variable at a time. Chikwe and Biriowu (2018), expressed that the univariate statistics are used in the description of key features of the generated data, as well as the provision of simple summaries of the components of the predictor and criterion variables.

Table 1: Mean Score Evaluation of Study Variables Components

Description	Job Design	Flexible Work Hour	Organizational Performance
Mean	2.007	1.809	1.801
Std. Dev.	0.100	0.056	0.056
Minimum	1.200	1.200	1.002
Maximum	4.00	4.00	4.00
N	108	108	108

Source: Research Data, and SPSS Output

Table 1 shows that job design as a dimension of stress management strategy has a mean score of 2.007 and standard deviation of 0.100, while the minimum and maximum mean scores are 1.200 and 4.00, respectively. Similarly, flexible working hour as a dimension of stress management strategy has a mean score of 1.809 and standard deviation of 0.056, with the minimum and maximum mean scores of 1.200 and 4.00, respectively. Organizational performance as a measure in our study has the mean score of 1.801 and standard deviation of 0.056. The minimum and maximum mean scores are 1.002 and 4.00, respectively. Table 1 and analysis show that all the dimensions and measure of the variables have their means scores below the maximum mean score output of 4.00. This understanding implies that some of our respondents demonstrated both low job design and low flexible working hours in their hospital jobs architecture. These demonstrations correlationally reflected to some extent low organizational performance as a result of high stress impact.

Table 2: Results of the Hypotheses Test using Pearson's Correlation (r) between the Study Variables (N = 108)

Variables	Organizational Performance	p-value
Job Design	0.684**	Ho ₁
Flexible working hour	0.698**	Ho ₂

Source: Research Data, and SPSS Output.

** Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed); $p < 0.05$.

Table 2 shows the results of the hypotheses tests demonstrating the correlational relationship between the key study variables. The results of hypothesis 1 indicates that, $r = 0.684$, $p < 0.05$. This implies that the hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 level of significance, and statistically strong and significant relationship exists. In the same vein, the results of hypothesis 2 show that, $r = 0.678$, $p < 0.05$. This also implies that the hypothesis is rejected and statistically significant relationship exists. Based on these, our study therefore asserts that job design and flexible working hour as dimensions of stress management strategies impact on organizational performance of selected public and private hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Test of Posited Hypotheses using Multiple Regression Technique

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate
1	.398 ^a	.159	.115	2.90438

^aPredictors: (constant), Job Design, Flexible Working Hour

Table 4: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean	F	Sign.
Regression	122.664	4	30.667	3.635	.000 ^b
Residual	649.530	78	8.436		
Total	772.194	82			

^aDependent Variable: Organizational Performance.

^bPredictors: (constant), Job Design, Flexible Working Hour.

Table 5: Coefficient

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	T	Sign.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	10.220	1.608		6.350	.000
Job Design	.962	.543	.245	1.773	.004
Flexible working Hour	.224	.370	.081	.607	.002

^aDependent Variable: Organizational Performance

Tables 3–5 show the results of hypotheses tests showing the multiple regression analysis of the effect of stress management strategies on organizational performance of selected public and private hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Based on r -value of 0.398 (i.e. 39.8%) and a probability value (p -value) of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 significant level, the study therefore, reveals that job design and flexible working hour have statistical significant influence on organizational performance of private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. On the whole, the regression model statistically and significantly predicts the outcome variable. This statistically implies that it is a good fit for the data ($f = 3.635$; $p < 0.05$). On the other hand, job design and flexible working hour have respectively, p -values of 0.004 and 0.002 indicating that there is a significant influence of these stress management strategies variables on organizational performance of selected private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, as they have p -value less than 0.05.

Similarly, from the Beta column, it is seen that, job design made the strongest unique contribution in managing managerial stress as well as explaining the dependent variable (Beta = 0.245), while flexible working hour (Beta = 0.081) as variable and strategy for stress management that enhanced organizational performance of our study private and public hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Consequent upon these results, we reject the null hypotheses and statistically accept the alternate hypotheses, and assert that our adopted stress management strategies positively, strongly and significantly impact on organizational performance in the study area.

CONCLUSIONS

This study strategically assessed certain stress management strategies/variables such as job design and flexible working hour that will reduce managerial stress for the enhancement of organizational performance in the study area. When strategic hospital workers perceive and understand that the hospital establishment has good job design and flexible working hour consciousness, their managerial stress associated with the hospital jobs will be reduced, thereby enhancing their specific outputs and overall organizational performance consciousness and achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings and conclusions of the study, we proffer the following recommendations.

- The hospital management directors should ensure that appropriate job designs are maintained and followed up in respective functional areas of the hospitals.
- In improving the flexible working hour policies, the Directors/Management of the hospitals should ensure that allowances are made in view of domestic considerations and engagements.
- There should also be mandatory routine medical check-ups of the hospital personnel in strategic duties and offices.

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